

Interim Draft Strategic Plan FY 2001 - 2006



DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

JULY 24, 2000

NOTE: The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is circulating this Interim Draft Strategic Plan for consultation purposes with veterans and other stakeholders. VA anticipates that the document will undergo further changes and enhancements before it is submitted to the Administration and the Congress in September 2000.

MISSION

“To care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan.”

These words, spoken by Abraham Lincoln during his Second Inaugural Address, reflect the philosophy and principles that guide VA in everything we do, and the focus of our endeavors to serve our Nation's veterans and their families.

VISION

“As the Department of Veterans Affairs heads into the 21st century, we will strive to meet the needs of the Nation's veterans and their families today and tomorrow. We will become an even more veteran-focused organization, functioning as a single comprehensive provider of seamless service to the men and women who have served our Nation. We will continuously benchmark the quality and delivery of our service with the best in business and use innovative means and high technology to deliver World-Class Service. We will foster partnerships with veterans and other stakeholders making them part of the decision-making process. We will cultivate a dedicated VA workforce of highly skilled employees who understand, believe in, and take pride in our vitally important mission.”

STRATEGIC GOALS

Restore the capability of disabled veterans to the greatest extent possible and improve their quality of life and that of their families

VA will achieve this goal of restoring the capability of disabled veterans by maximizing the ability of disabled veterans, special veteran populations, and their dependents and survivors to become full and productive members of society through a system of health care, compensation, vocational rehabilitation, life insurance, dependency and indemnity compensation, and dependents and survivors education. This system of benefits and services is aimed toward the broad outcome of restoration of the individual capabilities of our Nation's disabled veterans.

Ensure a smooth transition for veterans from active military service to civilian life

Veterans will be fully reintegrated into their communities with minimum disruption to their lives through transitional health care, readjustment counseling services, and employment services, including vocational rehabilitation; education assistance and home loan guarantees.

Honor and serve veterans in life and memorialize them in death for their sacrifices on behalf of the Nation

Veterans will have dignity in their lives, especially in time of need, through the provision of health care, pension programs and life insurance, and the Nation will memorialize them in death for the sacrifices they have made for their country. VA will achieve this goal by improving the overall health of enrolled veterans, and providing a continuum of health care for these and other special populations of veterans. VA will also provide life insurance benefits to veterans, ensure that burial need of veterans and eligible family members are met, and provide veterans and their families with symbolic expressions of remembrance.

Contribute to the public health, socioeconomic well being and history of the Nation

VA will support the public health of the Nation as a whole through medical research, medical education and training, and serving as a resource in the event of a national emergency or natural disaster; VA will support the socioeconomic well-being of the Nation through education, vocational rehabilitation, and home loan programs; and VA will preserve the memory and sense of patriotism of the Nation by maintaining national cemeteries as national shrines and hosting patriotic and commemorative ceremonies and events.

Create an environment that fosters the delivery of One VA world-class service to veterans and their families through effective communication and management of people, technology, crosscutting processes, and financial resources

VA's "enabling" goal, is different from the other four strategic goals. The enabling goal and its corresponding objectives represent the crosscutting activities that enable all organizational units of the VA to carry out the Department's mission. (VA's functions and activities focus on improving communications, enhancing the workforce assets and internal processes, and furthering the *One VA* philosophy of providing seamless service to veterans and their families)

Contents

Introduction

Secretary's Statement	4
Who We Serve	6
Who We Are	9
Our Core Values.....	10
Strategic Outlook	11

Goals, Objectives and Performance Measures

Strategic Goal 1	16
Objective 1.1.....	17
Objective 1.2.....	19
Objective 1.3.....	21
Objective 1.4.....	22
Strategic Goal 2	23
Objective 2.1.....	24
Objective 2.2.....	26
Objective 2.3.....	28
Strategic Goal 3	29
Objective 3.1.....	30
Objective 3.2.....	34
Objective 3.3.....	36
Objective 3.4.....	38
Objective 3.5.....	40
Strategic Goal 4	41
Objective 4.1.....	42
Objective 4.2.....	43
Objective 4.3.....	44
Objective 4.4.....	45
Objective 4.5.....	47
Enabling Goal	48
Objective E-1.....	49
Objective E-2.....	52
Objective E-3.....	54
Objective E-4.....	55

Supporting Analysis	58
----------------------------------	-----------

Appendices	64
Appendix 1 - VA Strategic Planning Alignment	64
Appendix 2 - Management Challenges	66
Appendix 3 - Crosscutting Activities	71
Appendix 4 - Data Capacity.....	72

Secretary's Statement



Since joining VA, I have worked with my leadership team to position the Department to address the changing needs of veterans and I am proud of the Department's accomplishments which have directly benefited veterans.

The following summary reflects our progress and recent trends in providing timely, high-quality services to veterans:

- VA continues to transform from a hospital-based system to a managed care/primary care system with 1,100 sites where health care is delivered to veterans. VA has expanded its system to include more than 500 ambulatory and community-based clinics.
- In FY 1999, the number of unique patients treated by VA increased by 14.9 percent over FY 1998. In the same timeframe, outpatient visits increased by 15.8 percent.
- VA launched a new uniform benefits package plan for veterans that provided easier access to a broader array of services at VA facilities. The new plan permits VA to manage its resources more effectively, and to provide a continuum of health care to veterans. At the end of FY 1999, nearly 4.2 million veterans had enrolled in VA's health care system, an increase of approximately one-half million over the 3.7 million veterans enrolled in 1998.
- VA launched several initiatives in the area of Hepatitis C, an emerging public health issue which many have noted is analogous to the early stages of AIDS awareness as a public health problem. VA established two centers of excellence for research and treatment of Hepatitis C.
- VA implemented a *Case Management* approach to claims processing, having individuals and teams responsible for every aspect of the claims process. The *case manager* keeps the veteran informed of the status of the claim by written, telephone or personal contact. With this level of individual or team involvement, our commitment to enhanced accuracy in our claims process and better information for veterans is assured.
- VA has made significant improvements in telephone service. The blocked call rate (busy signal) has been reduced from 52 percent in 1998 to a projected less than 4 percent in 2000. VA established a toll-free telephone service for education beneficiaries and the hold time for Insurance Program phone calls is projected to be 20 seconds. In addition, VA established Internet sites where veterans and beneficiaries can obtain information and interact with VA.
- The Vice President's National Partnership for Reinventing Government (NPR) has recognized VA as the government leader in plain language letter writing. The Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) sends out approximately 30 million pieces of correspondence annually. Since letters are still the primary means of communication with our veterans families, VBA is rewriting the hundreds of VBA's pattern letters and paragraphs that account for the majority of the correspondence it sends out.

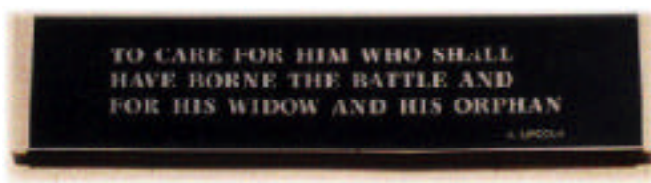
-
- A joint effort by the Departments of Defense, Labor, and Veterans Affairs provided job assistance to 130,000 disabled veterans with special needs.
 - VA's direct grants program provided more than \$26 million for community-based activities to help homeless veterans.
 - Grants totaling over \$6 million were awarded through the State Cemetery Grants program. This allowed VA to fund construction of State veterans cemeteries, which complemented VA national cemeteries.
 - In 1999, VA opened Saratoga National Cemetery in New York, and Abraham Lincoln National Cemetery in Illinois. In FY 2000, VA opened Dallas - Fort Worth National Cemetery and Ohio Western Reserve National Cemetery.

This Interim Draft is part of VA's effort to revise the Strategic Plan under the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA). It is intended to communicate a top-level summary of the long-term direction of VA. The framework of this plan centers around VA's four strategic goals and an enabling goal. These goals are all *One VA* in nature reflecting the combined efforts of all organizational elements to serve our Nation's veterans and their families. Supporting each goal, VA has developed more outcome-oriented objectives and identified key strategies and processes, external factors, and performance targets for 2005. VA's effectiveness will be determined by how well the needs and expectations of veterans are met. VA's success will also be measured by how it manages resources to provide services and benefits in a way that satisfies the American public's commitment to veterans.

In this vein, VA will implement each of the goals and objectives in this Strategic Plan in a manner that reflects our commitment to world-class service. With respect to each *One VA* goal and objective, we will continually strive to meet or exceed the service delivery expectations of veterans and their families by delivering accurate, timely, and courteous service and benefits in a cost-effective and efficient manner.

I am confident we are an effective organization today; however, I want to stress to our stakeholders, the American taxpayer, VA employees, and most important, our Nation's veterans, that the Department of Veterans Affairs will continue to strive for excellence in all areas.

Togo D. West, Jr



Who We Serve

Our Continuous Focus on Our Nation's Veterans

"To care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan."
These words, spoken by Abraham Lincoln during his Second Inaugural Address, reflect the philosophy and principles that guide VA in everything we do, and the focus of our endeavors to serve our Nation's veterans and their families.

Since the earliest days of our country - even before there officially was a United States - support for veterans and their families has been a national concern. In 1636, the Plymouth Colony passed a law that provided lifetime support for any soldier who returned from battle with an injury. In 1778, the first national pension law was enacted for soldiers who fought in the American Revolution. President Lincoln signed legislation in 1862 which authorized national cemeteries. In 1865, the National Home for Volunteer Soldiers was established, and homes for disabled Civil War veterans were opened in several locations throughout the country.

In 1917, the United States Government Life Insurance program was established. In 1930, a major consolidation of veterans service functions occurred when President Hoover signed a bill which established the Veterans Administration, an independent Federal agency that incorporated the Veterans Bureau, Bureau of Pensions and National Home for Volunteer Soldiers.

During World War II, the Nation's most far-reaching program for veterans was established with the passage of the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, also known as "The GI Bill of Rights," which offered low interest loans to purchase homes, farms or small businesses; unemployment benefits; financial assistance for education; and health care and rehabilitation services. Ultimately, in 1988, recognizing the need to coordinate the full range

of services for our Nation's veterans, Congress established a new cabinet post creating the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

Just as the history of our country has been evolutionary in nature, we can expect that the VA of the future will continue to transform. Today, there are over 25 million men and women who have served in the armed forces. VA currently provides health care, burial benefits, and benefit services to millions of veterans as well as eligible survivors and dependents of veterans. The needs of today's veterans and their families will continue to change. While the veteran population of the next century may be smaller, veterans will live longer and may require additional health care and benefit services. As a Department, our vision must be:

"As the Department of Veterans Affairs heads into the 21st century, we will strive to meet the needs of the Nation's veterans and their families today and tomorrow. We will become an even more veteran-focused organization, functioning as a single comprehensive provider of seamless service to the men and women who have served our Nation. We will continuously benchmark the quality and delivery of our service with the best in business and use innovative means and high technology to deliver World-Class Service. We will foster partnerships with veterans and other stakeholders making them part of the decision-making process. We will cultivate a dedicated VA workforce of highly skilled employees who understand, believe in, and take pride in our vitally important mission."

The delivery of veteran services is accomplished through our 172 medical centers, 527 ambulatory and community-based outpatient clinics (519 community-based clinics, 4 independent clinics, and 4 mobile clinics), 206 vet centers, 57 regional offices, more than 24 discharge centers, additional out-based locations, and 119 national cemeteries*.

VA exists to give meaning, purpose, and reality to America's commitment to her veterans.

The requirements, preferences, and expectations of veterans directly shape the services VA provides.

Two years ago the White House directed Federal agencies to engage in two-way Conversations with America to seek input from the general public on ways to improve government service, what kind and quality of services they want, and ascertain their level of satisfaction with existing services. VA has conducted a number of Conversations with America's Veterans gathering information through a written questionnaire. Four main themes emerged from the participants' responses: (a) enhance the delivery of health care; (b) expedite and improve claims processing; (c) explore more partnerships with stakeholders; and (d) promote both organizational and employee accountability. As a result of the information obtained from these Conversations the Department decided to expand this initiative in 1999 and talk to veterans in small discussion groups.

VA spoke with 128 veterans at 11 discussion groups conducted across the country. The participants were asked a series of questions about their perceptions of VA and its programs and services. The information gathered fell into three main categories: Medical, Benefits, and Management. In some cases there were both

positive and negative comments regarding the same benefit or service from different discussion groups. Some of the positive comments included: VA provides high quality medical care, implementation of primary care has provided better continuity, there is better access to care, benefits and service delivery are provided well once eligibility is established, and communication with veterans has improved. The main areas of concern to veterans in the discussion groups included:

Medical

- Gulf War veterans – If physicians can't diagnose they usually won't treat, the "Gulf War exam" seems to be designed to appease veterans instead of treating them.
- Lack of capacity for nursing home and long term care.
- Women's needs are not being fully addressed.

Benefits

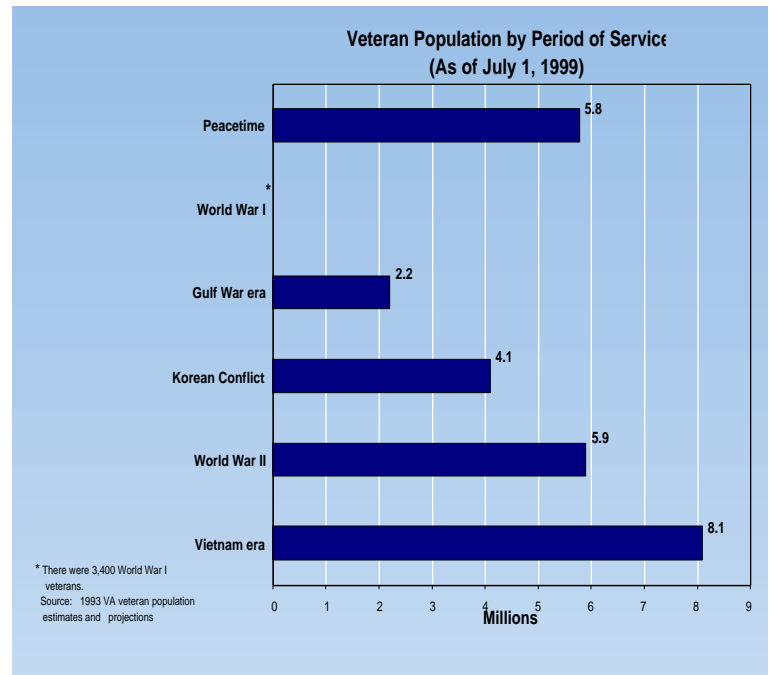
- Claim processing – Excessive delays, VA's attitude seems to be to deny claims hoping the veteran will give up.

Management

- Too many non-veteran employees who do not understand what it means to be a veteran, hire more veterans, more compassionate and sensitive staff.
- Provide better communication of programs and services available to veterans, e.g., expand the Transition Assistance Program, provide information kiosks at every VA facility, and expand internet capability.

** These facility numbers are likely to change by the September publication date.*

VA serves a wide array of veterans and eligible members of their families. The veteran population in 2000 is 24.4 million. In addition, VA serves over 600,000 dependents and survivors, and 4.1 million veterans are enrolled in VA health care. The first chart shows the population size of veterans that VA serves by period of service. The second chart shows the expected number of participants that VA serves in our major program areas. Additional veteran demographic data can be found in the "Supporting Analysis" section beginning on page 55.



Program		FY 2001 Participants
Medical Care --	Unique Patients	3,894,800
Compensation --	Veterans	2,285,000
	Survivors/Children	300,900
Pension --	Veterans	363,000
	Survivors	252,900
Education --	Veterans/Servicepersons	309,300
	Reservists	70,900
	Survivors/Dependents	48,530
Vocational Rehabilitation --	Veterans Receiving Services	50,700
Housing --	Loans Guaranteed	250,000
Insurance --	Administered Policies	2,047,000
	Supervised Policies (SGLI)	2,307,000
	Supervised Policies (VGLI)	363,000
Burial --	Interments	87,950
	Graves Maintained	2,447,300
	Headstones/Markers Provided	349,000

Who We Are

VA's mission is *"To care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan."*

President Lincoln's simple, yet eloquent proclamation has transcended many generations of veterans, and it is prominently displayed on the front of the Department of Veterans Affairs Central Office building, located near the White House in Washington, DC. Each year, thousands of visitors from our Nation's cities, suburbs, and small towns view this quotation as an enduring symbol of our commitment to veterans.



In today's environment, President Lincoln's statement reflects VA's responsibility to serve America's veterans and their families with dignity and compassion and be their principal advocate in ensuring that they receive medical care, benefits, social support, and lasting memorials promoting the health, welfare and dignity of all veterans in recognition of their service to this Nation.

The statutory mission for the Department of Veterans Affairs reflects our Nation's commitment to veterans as we are tasked as an organization *"To administer the laws providing benefits and other services to veterans and their dependents and the beneficiaries of veterans."*

(38 U.S.C. § 301(b), 1997)

VA's total obligations for FY 2001 are projected to be \$52.9 billion. Of that amount, \$23.8 billion will be for compensation and pension benefits, 7.6 billion for other benefits programs, \$21.3 billion will be spent on medical care, and \$316 million on burial operations and benefits and programs. The remainder of the budget is accounted for in various VBA programs, constitution, and administrative costs.

VA's Budget for FY 2001 totals 203,352 Full-Time Equivalents (FTE's). Including its part-time employees, VA's highly dedicated and diverse workforce exceeds 240,000 individuals—over 13 percent of the total federal workforce. As one of the largest health care systems in the United States, VA employs over 13,000

physicians and 48,500 nurses who are highly trained and dedicated to providing top quality health care to our veterans at more than 150 VA medical centers (VAMCs) nationwide. In order to ensure that veterans and their dependents receive accurate and responsive benefits services, VA employs approximately 2,000 Veterans Claims Examiners, 1,500 Veterans Service Representatives, and 500 Loan Specialists at over 50 VA regional offices. Approximately 600 VA caretakers and 200 VA laborers and equipment operators are dedicated to memorializing those who have served our country and their dependents at over 100 National Cemeteries nationwide.

VA has facilities in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, and the Philippines and provides services and benefits through the following 10 major business lines:

- **Medical Care**
- **Medical Education**
- **Medical Research**
- **Compensation**
- **Pension**
- **Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment**
- **Education**
- **Housing**
- **Insurance**
- **Burial**

Our Core Values

To implement our mission and to achieve our strategic goals, we will strive to uphold a set of core values that represents the basic fabric of our organizational culture. These values transcend all organizational boundaries and apply to everything we do as “*One VA*.” Each member of the VA team endeavors to practice the following values when serving veterans and when working with others.

RESPECT AND COMMITMENT

- Veterans have earned our respect and commitment; our efforts are directed toward meeting their needs.
- We believe that integrity, fairness, and respect must be the hallmarks of our interactions.

OPEN COMMUNICATION

- We are committed to open, accurate, and timely communication with veterans, employees, and external stakeholders.
- We listen to the concerns and views of veterans, employees, and external stakeholders to bring about improvements in the programs and services we provide.

EXCELLENCE IN SERVICES, PROGRAMS, AND PEOPLE

- We continually strive to meet or exceed service delivery expectations of veterans and their families by delivering accurate, timely, and courteous service and benefits in an effective and efficient manner.
- We are committed to improved access for veterans and their families through facility location and design, and innovative uses of information technology.
- We perform at the highest level of competence and take pride in our accomplishments.
- We are open to change and value a culture where everyone is involved, accountable, respected, and appreciated.
- We value teamwork and cooperation — operating as *One VA* to deliver world-class, seamless service to veterans and their families.

Strategic Outlook

Developing a Futures Perspective in the VA Strategic Plan

Looking back from 2010 and 2020 helps improve VA's perspective on what it needs to do in 2005. By using a futures approach and examining possible scenarios for veterans, their families, and VA programs in 2010 and 2020, VA may arrive at a different approach to key strategic issues than it would by simply projecting from 2000-2005. GPRA does not require this futures analysis, but VA believes that it is especially important given the predicted decline of the veteran population between 2000 and 2020 and the predicted increase in benefits and service requirements of an aging population of veterans.

HEALTH CARE

VA will respond to the changing health care marketplace by developing plans that ensure its full participation in the future of national health care. These plans are grounded in VHA's *6 for 2006* strategic framework that contains strategic objectives, enabling strategies, and performance measures. Together, these elements represent VHA's highest priorities for providing health care to veterans now and in the future. VHA's health care objectives are directly aligned with the Department's strategic goals and are based on the five domains of value for the health care mission along with VHA's other responsibilities to the larger health care community. The strategic objectives and strategies are:

1. Put Quality First Until First In Quality

- Systematize quality

- Improve the process for measuring and reporting the outcomes of care

- Improve the safety of the care environment for patients and employees

2. Provide Easy Access To Medical Knowledge, Expertise, and Care

- Provide right care at the right time in the right place

- Advance medical information technology

- Implement Veterans Health Initiative

- Improve Mental health and Substance Abuse care

- Establish Comprehensive Long Term Care

3. Enhance, Preserve And Restore Patient Function

- Emphasize health promotion and disease prevention

- Enhance rehabilitation for veterans with special needs

- Improve functioning through use of prosthetics devices

4. Exceed Patients' Expectations

- Provide compassionate service

- Ensure shared decision making between patients and providers

- Streamline processes for world class service

- Simplify communications to benefit patients

5. Save More Dollars To Serve More Veterans

- Address realignment of infrastructure

- Partner with DoD and HCFA

- Excel at cost effectiveness

6. Build Healthy Communities

- Achieve excellence in health system design and evaluation

Expand research for veterans and the general public

Enhance excellence in medical education

Improve response to national emergencies

Enhance community partnerships

Expand Homeless programs

The breadth of experience and the richness of expertise that VA health care provides have been enhanced and strengthened by the strategic framework and will be the hallmark of VHA's commitment to quality care for veterans. This success is demonstrated by achieving comparable or better performance when benchmarked against private sector best practices. VA will strive to achieve a level of quality that sets a national standard of excellence for the health care industry.

The third component of VHA's planning framework is developing and continually improving performance measurement. A balanced set of measures have been developed to provide information on the outcomes of clinical programs as well as other information about administrative and financial functions.

Beyond the *6 for 2006* strategic framework, VA's diverse missions present a unique opportunity for participation in the nation's future health care system. VA is the largest single provider of health professionals in the world. VA's research program is one of the largest and most productive research organizations in the country. While currently focused on directly benefiting the veteran population, in the future, the VA research program could also make an enormous contribution to medicine and health care worldwide.

VA's mission to provide contingency support to the Department of Defense (DoD) and the Public

Health Service during times of disaster or national emergency also has a benefit that will continue to play a major role in the future. VA is, and will remain, one of the Federal government's principal assets for responding with medical assistance to large-scale natural or technological emergencies.

Projecting into the distant future, VA fully expects to play an active role in establishing a national, integrated health care delivery system. The future "system" will require all VA components to function together and in concert with private health care facilities and resources to meet the health care needs of the enrolled population and minimize unnecessary duplication of services. This system will promote clinical efficiency, assure high quality care, and provide optimal access for the veteran population. "High quality care" of the future will be defined by VA as relevant benchmark indicators. "Optimal access" will mean that services and facilities are located in optimal proximity to the need for them while meeting the prevailing community standard for accessibility. VA's future will be enhanced by forging relationships with others, by providing the broad array of services and resources that contribute critical infrastructure elements to the national health care system, and by assuming leadership positions in areas of special expertise.

BENEFITS AND SERVICES

An important aspect of VA's mission is to provide benefits and services to veterans and their families in a responsive, timely, and compassionate manner. VA will improve the lives of veterans and their families by assessing the impact of the benefits and services and ensuring that their needs and expectations are met.

At the heart of VA's strategic planning is measurable success. VA is committed to evaluating and improving performance that will

drive our future success in benefits delivery. VA applies knowledge, dedicated management and workforce, attention to training, and funding, to achieve effective delivery of benefits and services to our customers and stakeholders. We seek to improve the access to our services for veterans and their families. VA also focuses on its employees, and their learning and growth, in achieving this effective service delivery.

VA has a series of veteran-focused service delivery performance measures that describe the service delivery interaction between VA and the veteran using our benefits and services. VA will continually strive to meet or exceed the service delivery expectations of veterans and their families by delivering accurate, timely and courteous service. VA will measure service delivery through a *balanced scorecard* approach, which includes veteran satisfaction, speed, accuracy, cost and employee development.

Key long-term strategies include the following:

- Focus on Organizational Performance — The *balanced scorecard* approach for the delivery of benefits and services contains measures of accuracy, speed, customer satisfaction, cost, and employee development.
- An environment committed to improving performance — An organizational structure containing 9 Service Delivery Networks (SDNs) fosters an environment where cooperative management and a team approach assists in the delivery of benefits. Information and resources are shared among the SDNs allowing for greater workload management. Finally, Directors within each SDN operate as a Board of Directors.
- Emphasis on Legitimate Performance Measures — Improved data collection and enhanced data exchanges among federal agencies allows for enhanced data integrity.
- Clarification of Program Outcomes — Program outcomes are being clarified so that our employees, stakeholders, and veterans understand the intent of our entitlement programs.
- A Comprehensive IT Strategy — Guidance for current and future IT development efforts will benefit from a cohesive approach to development and implementation.
- Access and Outreach — VA will provide veterans with easy access to information at a time and place convenient for veterans.
- Partnerships — VA will form alliances to improve efficiency of the claims process and the quality of benefits and services.
- Business Process Engineering — Reengineered business processes will improve the business information environment that enhances veterans' ability to access information.
- Program Evaluation — Program evaluations and other studies will provide information and data to explore opportunities to design new benefits and services to improve veterans' quality of life.
- Workforce and Succession Planning — VA will develop a competent and committed workforce and maximize use of new technology to poise the organization to meet the demands imposed by an ever-changing work environment. There is a potential for a serious shortage of qualified employees to process claims, given the significant number of employees eligible to retire in the next five years, the difficulty of hiring in a strong economy, and the lead time to train and develop experienced claims examiners.

- Servicemembers Considered Veterans — VA will continue to treat servicemembers who are eligible for certain VA administered benefits as “veterans.”

BURIAL BENEFITS

Demographic data of the aging veteran population projects 572,000 veteran deaths will occur in 2000, and the number of veteran deaths will peak in 2008 at 620,000. After 2008, the number of veteran deaths will slowly decline, and in 2015, it is estimated that there will be 578,000 veteran deaths.

To continue to provide burial options for veterans at the current level or to increase the percentage of the veteran population served, VA is planning for the development of six new national cemeteries in the remaining locations identified in the 1987 and 1994 Reports to Congress. It will also be critical for VA to continue to provide service at existing national cemeteries by completing phased development projects in order to make additional gravesites or columbaria available for interments. National cemeteries expected to close due to depletion of grave space must be identified, and VA must determine the feasibility of extending the service periods of those cemeteries by the acquisition of adjacent or contiguous land or by the construction of columbaria on existing land.

Further, as public acceptance of cremation as a burial option continues to grow, construction of columbaria is an option to maximize service delivery. Further into the future, VA may consider the possibility of developing columbaria-only cemetery sites, particularly in areas where land is scarce and the demand for cremation burials is high. The State Cemetery Grants Program (SCGP) will continue to be a key strategy toward achieving the goal of providing a burial option for all veterans.

PARTNERSHIPS TO SERVE VETERANS

VA continuously strives to foster effective working partnerships especially with veterans. VA also works with other stakeholders in the Administration, Congress, the veterans service organizations (VSOs), state veterans affairs organizations, and national labor unions.

This active partnership and consultation process is accomplished, in part, by participating in open forums to discuss strategic issues and determine levels of satisfaction from the veterans VA serves. Consequently, the strategic direction for VA is significantly affected by the input received from veterans and their representatives throughout the Nation.

VA uses this information as a basis for additional stakeholder consultation to further define its strategic direction. (Additional information will be included in the September, 2000 Strategic Plan from the results of the VA Environmental Scan).

SCENARIO-BASED PLANNING

During the next few months, VA will develop alternative scenarios for the future that will help shape the future VA. As part of this scenario-based planning process, numerous variables will be taken into account, including such variables as national defense policy, the nature of future conflicts, the implementation of cooperative program initiatives with other federal, state, and local government agencies and the private sector, developments in medical and information technology including the potential impact of the “digital age”, and a host of other variables that have implications for the future of VA.

These variables, both internal and external, will be reduced to “key drivers.” VA will assign ranges of values to these key drivers, and use them to develop specific scenarios. In the near-term, VA

will then use these scenarios to test the robustness of its strategies and processes. Beginning in 2001, VA will use the scenarios to develop long-term goals and objectives for the Department that will provide a true strategic

direction for VA to 2025. VA will conduct this scenario-based planning process in consultation with its stakeholders as part of the VA *Four Corners* consultation process.

VA provides benefits and services to veterans and their families throughout the nation. This chart shows the population of veterans in the fifty states and D.C.